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Interview with Overt Ray Rich (FA 33)

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TRANSCRIPTION

Name of Oral History Project: Prison Ministry
Tape 1 of 1 The number of the tape being transcribed: 1
Name of narrator: Overt Ray Rich
Address: 430-A 12th Street Bowling Green, Ky. 42101
Tel: 502-781-7886
Name of principal interviewer: Greg Jenkins
Date of interview: November 13, 1987
Place of interview: Interviewer's kitchen
Other persons present at interview: None
Equipment used: Cassette Model: Marantz
Tape used: Brand: Scotch 3M
Amount (side 1) 30 min. (side 2) 30 min.
Summary description of interview context and contents:
The interview between Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Rich took place in the interviewer's kitchen. It was the first interview between the two. The talk consisted generally of what Mr. Rich does, prison ministry, and why. He also spoke much about being in prison himself.

SIDE 1

Jenkins: I've got a few questions I want to ask you. And this is Greg Jenkins and I'm doing an interview with Ray Rich and he is a prison minister that lives in Bowling Green on 12th

Street, and today is what, the 13th?

Rich: Friday the 13th.

Jenkins: Friday the 13th! Oh, I didn't even think about that.

All right, here goes some general questions. Who are you, so to speak?

Rich: I'm Overt Ray Rich, the full gospel prison minister, here in Bowling Green.

Jenkins: Is that all you're going to say? All right. Well, here is another question for you. If someone asked you, what you do; what would you tell them?

Rich: Well, prison ministry, is what I do. I go in and out of jails in Kentucky and most all of the prisons here in Kentucky. I just go in basically and minister one on one, and then I go into a chapel there and hold service. Where there's about one hundred to two hundred men come to the services while I'm there.

Jenkins: What is hold service?

Rich: That means like a church. You know, they don't have a church inside of the prison except out on the yard. So we call it a fish tank. When you first go to prison, you become a fish. So they put you in a fish tank. It's a place where you live for approximately^{about} twenty-eight days.

Jenkins: Is that with a group of people?

Rich: That's probably two hundred to three hundred men all together at one time for about twenty-eight days. That's where they give you a physical. They check you and see if you have any kind of problem^{or} to where they need to take

care of you while you're incarcerated in prison. Like if you need glasses, if you need teeth, braces, operation. They do all that for you in prison.

Jenkins: That's not a bad set up.

Rich: [laughs] The thing about crime, see, ~~It's~~ not the prison, it's the separation from your family. That's more than punishment, not the years that you give-- get, it's the years that you're separated from society. That's the punishment.

Jenkins: Never looked at it that way. I guess I could-- I've never known a person that was in prison. That's about it. Well, let me ask you another question. Here goes. How did you become involved in prison ministry?

Rich: Well, being involved because I was in prison myself. Ah, in 1981 I was convicted here in Warren County for the third drug dealer in ^{Warren} ~~one~~ county. And I was convicted as a four time loser, that was my fourth conviction of being in prison.

Jenkins: Four time loser?

Rich: Yeah, what that means, that means you've been to prison more than one time. So I went to prison four different times. 1981, I was convicted and given life and five years here in Warren County where I minister at right now.

Jenkins: Life?

Rich: Uh huh, and then I was sent to La Grange the same way everybody else was. And I began to start minstering there at La Grange and met Mike Humble, the guy that's over the

prison ministry right now. And after I got out, I got into the prison ministry and began to witness here in the Warren County Jail with most of the people that I've done time with. So that wasn't very easy but, you know, it gets better as you go on through the years.

Jenkins: Who's Mike Humble?

Rich: Mike Humble is the president and the prison coordinator of the Agape Prison Ministry that we're involved in.

Jenkins: So, it's a large group?

Rich: Well, it's pretty large, like, every year the 4th, and the 5th and the 6th of December, we go to prisons, stay for three days. Approximately sixty-five or seventy men. Last year it was nation wide in prison, and we had over 6,000 men in prison that were saved last year. 6,000 men, so we're looking forward to December the 4th, 5th, and 6th of this year.

Jenkins: Is it an anniversary? No.

Rich: Well, that's where we go back in and do it again. This one, we call it an invasion. It's a Kentucky Invasion, is the name of it. That's where the men from off the street-- that's ministers are-- that can go in, all denominations. We go in the prison and we can go in the room. We can eat with them. We talk to them. We're there for three days, like they are. And we're witnessing to these people and tell them that, you know, there's other ways besides crime.

Jenkins: So you said the area that you serve is not just in Bowling Green then?

Rich: No, I don't just serve Bowling Green. I serve, I witness in Russellville Jail. I witness in Louisville at the Kentucky State Reformatory. I witness at North Point Training Center in Danville, Kentucky and Butler County here in Morgantown, Kentucky.

Jenkins: That's interesting. When you say witness, you mean that you just use that term as far as going in and --

Rich: Well, witness isn't--

Jenkins: I mean, what does that term mean to you?

Rich: That means to me, is to go in and tell a man what God has done for me. And what God could do for them if they would allow Him to do it, you know.

Jenkins: Yeah, I don't know. I've been doing a little bit of work with gospel music so find-- trying different things to other people, so. But what made you decide to do this work, I mean, what really boiled down to it?

Rich: Well, when I was called into the ministry I felt like God wanted me to be where that I have been. And I felt that I could help more people that was locked up then, you know, people that was down, because I've been down. I've been a drunk. I've been a dope fiend. And I know how to talk to them and I feel like it's where God wanted me to be. So I went into prison ministry and jail ministry.

Jenkins: OK. What do you think, what's your typical approach to a new prisoner? How do you approach a new prisoner?

Rich: Well--

Jenkins: A prisoner, as in, the first time you've met him.

Rich: I just go in basically talking to him about, you know, usually they're watching TV; usually ask them about sports. Ah, ask them, you know, about are they trying to get-- better themselves ^{in the} into institution, like a GED while they're there. And then they begin to ask me who I am and then we begin to witnessing and start talking to them about God. But, basically, we talk on their terms when we first go in to witness to a man.

Jenkins: Yeah.

Rich: We sort of listen to him for a while, you know, because usually they got something to say. [laughs]

Jenkins: Yeah, sure. Well, what, what do you think the prisoners-- What do the prisoners mean to you as far as--

Rich: Well, the prisoners mean--

Jenkins: To you personally and also to what you're doing?

Rich: Well, personally to me the prisoners, you know, I'm not-- I think every man ought to be punished for crime. But, I think he ought to have a chance to frequent religion, ~~to~~ be allowed to know about Jesus. And I think personally to a prisoner to me is-- I just love them, and I know that there's a better way out here besides what they're doing, and to go in and tell them about that. Most of the inmates that I talk to, I've done time with.

Jenkins: Oh really?

Rich: Yeah. They usually know who I am when I get there. [laughs]

Jenkins: All right. So, well did you just get out then?

Rich: Yeah, I was released May the 14th, 1982.

Jenkins: '82 OK.

Rich: Yeah, I got out.

Jenkins: What type of prison was it? I mean, was it a minimum security?

Rich: Minimum security. You see, La Grange, Kentucky State Reformatory is the place where everybody goes except death row, and high security prisoners, they go to Eddyville State Penitentiary. But everybody goes to La Grange to be processed. That means you spend twenty-eight days in this fish tank, they call it, with two hundred to three hundred men. And basically they give you a physical all the way through and find out what kind of record you got; if they can put you in a camp somewhere that's closer to home and stuff like that. But everybody goes to Kentucky State Reformatory when they're first convicted.

Jenkins: Have you ever had any bad experiences in doing this kind of work?

Rich: No, I've-- Every inmate, every jail. I mean, I've--sometimes when you first go in, you know, everybody's pretty rowdy because most people that's in prison or jail don't believe there's a God. Not only is it that they don't believe there's a God, it's just that really people hadn't really reached out to Him. You know, not only tell them that there's a God but show them there's a God. Explain to them there's a God, what God represents and where God came from. See, that's mostly what people want to hear in prison is, 'Who is God?', 'Where did God come from?', 'Why

would He want to do what He done for somebody like us?' But to realize that He didn't only do it for them, He done it for people that's out here, too. So I haven't had no bad experience. All prisoners have been good to me. [laughs]

Jenkins: That's pretty good. Pretty lucky.

Rich: Yeah, I'm sure I am.

Jenkins: Well, what type of crimes do most of the prisoners commit that you come in contact with?

Rich: Well, I come in contact with all types. We come in contact with child abuse, people that have abused little children. And we come in contact with murderers, robbers, rapists, store house break in, grand larceny, car theft, about anything you can mention. They're all there. It's just harder when I first went in was to witness to someone. The hardest witness was to witness to someone on child abuse, knowing that I had children of my own. But I had to learn to love them the way I learned to love everybody else. Because it's not a bad thing, it's a sickness, it's a disease, you know. They're sick and really I don't blame it on them. So I witness to them just like I do everybody else. But then I have seen ministers in there for that charge. So, it's hard to go into prison and tell somebody that there's a God, when there's somebody there that's suppose to know God, committing the same crime that they're committiing. So that's about the worst experience I've had, is to witness to somebody like that.

Jenkins: Does that happen a lot?

Rich: Well, not that much. I say three percent is known God before, had dealings with God.

Jenkins: What extent do you think that, do you think they're willing to share their experiences with you? I mean, you know what I'm saying? How, to what extent as far as--

Rich: Well, when I go into prison now they use me as a counselor a lot, too. Lot of the men goes a long ways to tell me things that's happened to them, as far as, back when they was abused when they was children theirsself. Even people that has been sexually abused. Ah, homosexuals, people like that, is really-- most of them come from a background of being mistreated theirsself. Has been maybe raped by their daddy or abused by part of the family and stuff like that. So they go pretty far with me.

Jenkins: This may be a little bit redundant but, what types of real problems do you think that you and the prisoners share? I mean, what brings you really close to them?

Rich: Well, it's when we talk, mostly the problem is having somebody out here; that once they're convicted of a crime is to have somebody out here to continue to keep feeling for them and mostly to encourage them to love their families and get their families to hold on to them until they're released from prison or something like that.

Jenkins: Hmmm [pause]

Rich: But most every man that's married that goes to prison, sixty-five percent of that man loses his wife, family. Yeah, usually they get a divorce. There's a real good

percentage of getting divorce because of institutionalize.

Jenkins: Really?

Rich: So, we try to-- The biggest thing is to try to work with the inmate and get close to him and maybe find out where his family is to where we can maybe go to his family and encourage his wife not to divorce him. But to give him a

chance and continue to write him and help him and lift him up until he's released. And then if you decide that you don't care, then there's a time for separation. But not because he's in prison. You know, because he will be back.

Jenkins: So a lot of your work then is going to the families?

Rich: Oh Yeah. We work with families. Yeah, we do that. We always try to do that.

Jenkins: Let's see, this is-- might be a little catch question but. When you're going in there, are you trying to get the prisoners to accept Christ or are you just trying to help them get through this ordeal?

Rich: Well, my main prerogative when I go in there is to tell them about Jesus. And to let them know that although we can't see God, that he's really there, and he really wants to help. My main thing is tell them about Jesus and to let them know that Jesus can comfort while they're in there and can protect while they're in there. You know, because prison, it's very easy to get hurt in prison. Because especially in the summer time there's nothing in there but men and everyone of them has got a problem. You know, they begin to have riots and begin to kill one another and it gets pretty dangerous in there. So, God can protect them and my main resource is to tell them about Jesus and try to get them to accept God. And try to get them to realize that there is a better life on the outside of prison. By being honest, not only honest to the people, but first you got to

be honest with yourself. So, that's my main thing is to tell them about Jesus.

Jenkins: When you talk about the riot, have you ever been in there after or before a riot.

Rich: Yeah, several people got hurt real bad. Some of them got killed and cut up real bad, and stabbed, and beaten up real bad. So, it gets pretty rough when you talk about fifteen hundred men fighting at one time. [laughs]

Jenkins: I can imagine.

Rich: [laughs] That's a pretty big fight.

Jenkins: Did a prison minister come by after that, and try to talk to the people?

Rich: Oh Yeah. They have chaplains, regular ministers in the prison at all times. Because we call the fish tank, don't have a chaplain, but like when you get released to go out on the yard, you have a dorm that you go in, like an apartment. But then you have a church out there and you have a chaplain that you can talk to at all times if you want to talk to him. There's always one there if you need him or, you know, all religion; Catholic, Baptist, you know. There is always somebody there to talk to.

Jenkins: So what, in your type of work you're not involved, you're going into the prisons as opposed to-- What distinction is there between what you're doing and what a minister does in the, that's inside the prison and stays there? Is there a distinction or is it the same type?

Rich: No, it is the same type, except it's someone new all the

time. Now the chaplain on the yard don't have as many opportunities to go in the fish tank and see every man that we see. See the fish tank is where you might stay fifteen days, up to twenty-eight days and you may not go out on the yard; you may go to an honor camp somewhere, a jail, like jail release. You may may just leave the fish tank and he may never see you. Now the people that we see, probably forty percent of them, he'll never see.

Jenkins: What types of stories do you tell the prisoners?

Rich: Well, basically, right now, is to tell them that I have been convicted, which they can usually tell that when they see me. Ah, by the tattoos and things like that and the attitude that I preach. They usually know that I've been in prison. Because out of every one hundred people that's in there, there's three or four that knows me. But, I usually tell them about me being convicted and the life of crime that I did live and how the family that I was raised up in and then how I turned out to be right now. You know, I feel like I've made a real big turn. So I tell them about how I feel that God has changed my heart to care about other people that I couldn't care about.

Jenkins: Is there any sort of typical story you use?

Rich: Yeah, I use the last time I went to prison and the time that I received like life and five years. See, you only have to do eight years before you're released. But I began to preach two and one-half months after I was in prison and I was released and on the streets in eight months. So, I mean

that's a big step, to where the judge personally hisself, the same judge that convicted me, turned around and said I didn't deserve life. He turns the sentence over and gives me five years. And I was supposed to done thirteen months on five years and he just turns later on and turns the whole sentence around and releases me and turns me loose.

Jenkins: They can do that?

Rich: Yeah. [laughs]

Jenkins: I didn't know that. They can do that by themselves, they don't need to call--

Rich: Right. They don't need no help. The judge can release you anytime he wants to.

Jenkins: But you think that's your typical story?

Rich: Yeah, that's a big story to let people know that God is real. Because I never prayed to ask God to release me from prison. I prayed to ask God to protect my family, my home, my mother and dad. You know, that none of them die while I was in prison. But one day God just released me and let me go. That's what I feel. You know that the judge had sent me didn't have no intentions to let me go. But then I was learned by an inmate that I had to learn to pray for people that I didn't love, people that I hated. And I began to pray for the judges and lawyers and people like that and then one day I was loose. I was out here to see if I'd do what I told God I'd do, so.

Jenkins: Then who came up to you and--

Rich: An inmate.

Jenkins: An inmate?

Rich: Uh huh. He's doing eighty-nine years. He's still in prison, Jerry Craves, one of the inmates. And Mike Humble, the president and the coordinator of the prison ministry. He came up to me a couple days later and started talking to me about the Lord and I began to tell him that I felt like I needed a change. You know, in God and to accept Jesus and he led me into a sinner prayer and I accepted Jesus in prison.

Jenkins: When you first approach someone if they- you know- if they don't seem as though they want to accept it what do you do? Do you leave them alone?

Rich: Yes, then I begin to ask them, you know, before you approach them. And they like have an attitude that they don't want to talk about God. Then I try to, within seconds, to move on to something that they might want to hear, like a ball game, or something like that, if they cared. And most inmates that don't want to hear about God will let you pray for their families. And they begin to trust you, you know, maybe the next time you come they'll want to talk to you, maybe it'll take three or four times before they ever talk to you. But eventually, when they see you care about their family, later on they'll want to talk to you.

Jenkins: Have you ever given up on a prisoner?

Rich: No, I've never seen one I'd give up on.

Jenkins: Really?

Rich: No.

Jenkins: It seems like--

Rich: A lot of them I've thought about, that deserve to be gave up but, you know, I didn't think that Jesus gave up on us. So, I haven't never give up on one no matter what he's convicted of or what his charge is, I still try to help him. I don't even look at his charge. I look at him that God cares for him, and that he can have a life out here. And live a normal life, and go to college or go-- no matter what he's been involved in he still can go to school. They've got colleges in prison. He can begin in prison and by the time he's released, he can go to Western or another college wherever he's from. Lot-- Some people have done that. I know several guys who went to Western, that was in prison, and locked up. So it can work out real good for you, when you go or it can work out real bad. Just which ever way you want it to go. But sort of, if you have somebody there to encourage you know that things can be better, it helps.

Jenkins: This is sort of a question. You know, we're told all about jail conditions, everybody is talking about jail conditions and how deplorable they are, so to speak. What do you think?

Rich: Well, my personal thing about jail conditions; now it's a whole lot better. You know, I'd say most of the inmates makes it rougher on theirsself. You know, really the jailer or the men that works the jail don't have nothing to do with the conditions of the jail. Only thing he has to do with the jail is to see that the jail is run and that the

inmates are locked up. But the conditions of the jail is run by the inmate. They keep it clean if they want it clean. If they want to live nasty then they can. But now the new jail we have here, the original jail, I'm sure it's kept clean. I haven't been in it because me and the jailer here has a problem.

Jenkins: Oh really, what's the problem?

Rich: Well, the problem is I filed charges against him here not long ago, because he has a drinking problem.

Jenkins: The jailer does?

Rich: And he would go in and beat men and women up, and mistreat people, and I didn't see that was right. Not to be a jailer. He has a bad drinking problem and he takes it out-- I feel that he takes his home problems out on other people. And that's why I- we've turned it over to the FBI. And I'm not involved with this jail here right now. So, I don't know how the jail is kept inside here, but I know that the other jail wasn't real good. It was terrible.

Jenkins: Why?

Rich: Well, it was just the filthiness of the jail and maybe one floor had approximately twenty men on it, and maybe one commode out of the whole walk would work.

Jenkins: Has that been recently?

Rich: Yeah, they haven't been in this jail down here I don't think a year yet.

Jenkins: The new jail?

Rich: Yeah, the Richland Jail. But the old jail, it's been there

for years. It was built in the '40s, I think. It's a real old jail.

Jenkins: I wonder, do the prisoners ever build parts of the facilities? Have you ever heard of that?

Rich: No, in the prisons the prisoners does all the work. You know, they do the concrete work, the brick work. But here in jails, mostly the only thing that inmates do is mop the floors, clean the windows, and maybe paint the inside of the jail, or something like that. That's about all they do. There's nothing to build inside of the jail, maybe a cabinet or something. But in prison see they have a regular body shops. They have welding shops. They have a college, you go to college. They have school, regular school from the eighth grade to the twelfth that you can go. They have carpentry work, they build houses and stuff like that in prison, to teach-- train for the men. You know, to get them ready for the streets to whatever they want to do when they come out here.

Jenkins: I guess this is going to come back to something that might touch you up. What's the attitude of the law enforcement officials towards you, and especially towards what you're doing?

Rich: Well, I've never-- as far as having any problem with them-- I've never had no problem which haven't had no dealings with them either. I know several officers that knows the Lord. But I've never, as far as police officers I wouldn't think they appreciate what you do. So I don't have that much

dealings with the police officers.

Jenkins: Why do you say that?

Rich: Well, they're out here to bust a crime. They're out here to get the man and I'm out here to help him to make him to come out here and you're talking about a man that may go and break in a house, then the police convicts him. He goes to prison for a year. And then he can go down there and train and get his life straightened out, then he can come back here and maybe get a job to where he gets more than a police officer, and then the police officer says, 'You know, I'm out here and may get killed anytime. And this guy goes to prison and he comes out and living a whole lot better life than I'm living. Now something ain't right.' [laughs] I've never owned nothing. I've never had nothing in my life. Everything I ever had, from the time I was twenty-six years old I either stole it or took it. But now just here in the last year I've bought a home. I have my own business here in town, it's not a big business, but it's better than being in prison. I mean, you can make an honest living. You're out here on the streets, you're out here helping people, and so I enjoy what I do now. And I have what I call a wino ministry.

Jenkins: A wino ministry? What's that?

Rich: Well, that's where I go down on Sundays. Instead of going to Sunday school, I go down here on Main Street, and I gather with all of the winos. And I sit down with the people that don't have a place to go and they talk to me; and tell me

their problems, and tell me how sorry the town is, and I listen to them and talk to them about it.

Jenkins: Do you do that every Sunday?

Rich: Every Sunday morning, I'm there about nine til about eleven o'clock during the day.

Jenkins: Are they street people?

Rich: Yeah, they're people that--most of them don't have a place to go. Most of them has families but they're being neglected by their families.

Jenkins: Do they sort of wander?

Rich: They sleep in cars. I have a couple of friends, you know, that just sleeps on the porch of an old store building here in town, behind a bunch of refrigerators to where they can stay warm. Then I have one that sleeps in the back of an old car, so.

Jenkins: How many people do you think you administer down there?

Rich: Around seven or eight Sunday morning. If it's pretty, if it's not pretty cold, they roll up somewhere to stay in.
[laughs]

Jenkins: I was going to ask you, as far as with the jailers, how do you get along with them? I mean--

Rich: Well, right now we're not getting along too good at all. We don't ever communicate with each other, because I've been advised by the FBI and by the prison ministry that I'm in, is not to go down there right now.

Jenkins: To the new prison?

Rich: To the new jail.

Jenkins: To the new jail?

Rich: Right.

Jenkins: But you still go to the old one?

Rich: Yeah, I go to prisons all over the county and jails and I don't have no problems, nowheres. I haven't had a problem in no prison or no jail except in Warren County. [laughs] And I guess that's because I was raised here. You know that has a lot affect on it, I guess. It's hard to convince people here that you've changed.

Jenkins: Yeah, since they've known you for so long.

Rich: Yeah, so I don't go down here to the jail right now.

Jenkins: What kind of communication do you have?

SIDE 2

Jenkins: OK. This is side two and I'm talking with Ray Rich and we were talking about your communication and--

Rich: Well, as far as the jailer and stuff like that, they still think I'm a dope fiend. They still think I deal in dope because my life is better. They know me-- they was-- the jailer that's here now I ran around with. I knowed him, I dranked^u with him, I ran around with him for years. He used to be a stock car driver here, a race car driver. And I ran^u around with him and he's know me that a way and he continues to think that I'm still a dope dealer, still dealing drugs. Because my life is getting better and better all the time.

So he can't figure that out.

Jenkins: So, he thinks you're selling drugs.

Rich: So he thinks I'm selling more drugs. [laughs] But I haven't fooled with drugs or-- I smoked cigarettes before I went to prison and I dranked and, as far as I know except Tylenol, or aspirin is about the only thing that's ever been in my body, except NyQuil. I have to take NyQuil. [laughs]

Jenkins: So you can go to sleep.

Rich: But I can really understand to where they're coming from except where you live, you know, they knowed you and they just can't believe that you can change. So, I just had to stay here and show them. That's my intentions is to stay here and show people that you can make it here in your home town no matter what people says about you. You can still make it right here. So that's why I'm here.

Jenkins: Do you guys ever get together and talk about what you used to do back a long time ago?

Rich: Oh yeah. We was talking about it today.

Jenkins: Yeah, like what?

Rich: Ah, they was telling me, you know, back how I was wild, and how I smoked pot, and how I would act when I got drunk, and like that. We were sort of laughing about it and these people that I was talking to, they knew how I was and they just-- they always say, 'Man, you just amaze me. How you used to do and now it's God this, God that, or God this and do this.' And they just say, 'You amaze me.' So that's the point, you don't have to do so much preaching to people

if you just show them. Just live it, is the main thing because they can see it in you. You don't have to preach.

Jenkins: All right, here's a question. Describe for me the typical prison minister.

Rich: What do you mean by that?

Jenkins: What do you think is the typical prison minister, as far as, the type-- like maybe that you, like how you are? Who is the typical prison minister?

Rich: What do you mean? What are you saying by when you mean typical?

Jenkins: Like what type of prison-- What type of prison ministers do you come in contact with most? What types-- Who are they? And where are they from?

Rich: Well mostly Baptist ministers from like Russellville, Texas, Florida, Hopkinsville, Owensboro. I meet a lot of real good ministers that really cares about the men. And they're like Assembly of God ministers. I meet some of them. And I meet a lot of different type ministers that holds churches and that comes-- brings people in from the church to witness to the men.

Jenkins: What do you think-- What percentage are ex-convicts themselves, you think?

Rich: Well, I, to me personally right now, only about five out of fifty of us has been incarcerated at a period of time. Now a lot of your preachers have been in jail if they admit it. You know, a lot of them, people don't know about, so they'd rather not talk about it. But most of your preachers,

there's a big percentage of ministers that have been locked up but not in prison, done big time or nothing like that. Maybe spent a night in jail for drunk back when they were sinners or something.

Jenkins: Any women prisoners? I mean, ministers?

Rich: Yeah, I meet-- There's about four right now here that I know of in Kentucky that goes to prison when we go sometimes and witness to the men, minister.

Jenkins: Do you guys get all together and--

Rich: Yeah, we usually meet in a restaurant in Louisville and then we all drive up to La Grange, and we all team up like a team, and go in. And lot of the women sings and plays guitars. We take them in and they play the guitars and sings and then somebody gets up and witnesses to the men.

Jenkins: What kind of songs do you sing?

Rich: Just gospel, stoney gospel.

Jenkins: stoney?

Rich: Well, we have rock gospel and people that goes in with us and then we have southern gospel, bluegrass gospel. We have different type bands that goes in each time. They mostly into southern gospel.

Jenkins: Who? The prisoners? The ministers?

Rich: Prisoners. They sort of like southern gospel, the black gospel, you know.

Jenkins: What names as far as the gospel family names or groups?

Rich: Ah, like, let's see, The Ridges Ramblers, The Spirituals--

Jenkins: Spiritual Ways?

Rich: No, just the Spirituals from Evanston, Kentucky, The Lighthouse Singers. Then, you know, that's about all that goes into prisons right now.

Jenkins: Well, what do you guys talk about when you get together.

Rich: Well, we usually just talk about what God's done for us during the week and how we all been blessed. And like who we've talk to, and what type of people have you talked to, and have-- What they say to you, and how they react to you when you tell them about Jesus. Like when we go on the streets and witness to people, they get pretty violent sometimes. But then how they just all of a sudden just calm down and listen to you. That's usually what we talk about. They tell us who they've talked to and what type people they've talked to. We tell them what type of people we've talked to and stuff like that. How many people accept Christ during the month or the week that we haven't seen each other.

Jenkins: Do you guys share hardships and stuff?

Rich: Oh yeah, we talk, like ministers have problems like everybody else. Ah, we sort of find someone that we can trust to talk our problems over with someone else, that's in the ministry to encourage us to maybe go on or maybe do something different than we had a way to do it.

Yeah, we encourage each other.

Jenkins: How many times a week do you, or how often do you guys meet?

Rich: Well, I go-- we go, we meet twice a month. We go into prisons, now I go to jails whenever they call me.

Sometimes, it's once a month, sometimes, it's twice and three or four times a month. Just whenever the papers or something they get filled out, I go. Like the 25th, I mean the 27th of this month, I'll be in Danville prison, in Danville, Kentucky. And then the 4th, 5th, and 6th, I'll be at Danville Prison for three days and nights.

Jenkins: That's the group, that's when--

Rich: The group, the group will be in.

Jenkins: And what do you guys call that?

Rich: It's called Kentucky Prison Invasion.

Jenkins: Invasion.

Rich: Right. It's where we invade the prisons. Which it was nation wide prison invasion last year. And it was done all over the world last year.

Jenkins: Really?

Rich: Yeah, so this year it'll only be in Kentucky, invasion.

Jenkins: It's just once a year.

Rich: Once a year, the 4th, 5th, and 6th of December. Sort of a couple weeks before Christmas. That's where we go in and encourage all the men about the holidays, because as far as to me, Christmas and New Years is the saddest day for a prisoner. So we take Christmas cards, envelopes, stamps and we try to give each inmate, you know, two or three

envelopes, two or three stamps, and two or three Christmas cards to send their families. Because a lot of them can't afford even to buy a stamp. They don't have the money.

Jenkins: Don't they work in there?

Rich: Yeah, they work but you only make about two dollars and forty cents a month. [laughs] That's no big paycheck.

Jenkins: Two packs of cigarettes a month.

Rich: [laughs] [pause]

Jenkins: Well, what other types of groups do prison ministry? As far as-- is it just prison ministers or is it--

Rich: No.

Jenkins: What other groups do you see coming in?

Rich: We have a lot of Baptist churches, ministers that's never ever been in prisons in their life. That comes in off the streets. We have an ex-narc that's a minister now. We have an ex-state trooper that's a chaplain at a prison right now. And we have an ex-convict that's a co-chaplain in one of the biggest prisons right now.

Jenkins: Where is this?

Rich: In Eddyville. Eddyville State Penitentiary. Wayne Hughes was in the federal penitentiary. Now he's a co-chaplain at Eddyville State Penitentiary. And Tim Odell was an ex-state trooper and a narc and been a police officer here in this county. And he's the chaplain now at Danville Prison. So God has moved in some people that [laughs] people wouldn't think so.

Jenkins: I guess we went over, I think once before but, what kind of

denominations end up working in prisons.

Rich: Well--

Jenkins: Or do prison ministry?

Rich: The denominations is only spoken on the outside of prison. We don't speak as-- When we go inside of the prison, we don't mention denominations.

Jenkins: Really?

Rich: We don't tell them that we're Baptist. We don't tell them we're Presbyterian. We don't tell them we're Catholic. We don't tell them we're Assembly of God, or nothing like that. We go in and tell them that we all have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. And when they ask us what church that we go to, we tell them what churches we go to, but we don't talk denominations. Because there's probably a million different denominations in prison. So the main thing is that I found out that all denominations knows Jesus. And before they can get where they got, they had to know Jesus. So we go in and talk about Jesus. Now on the outside we have people that you call holy-rollies. We have All-Baptist, Southern Baptist, different type Baptist ministers. We have Menonites that goes with us, into prison. Just all different types of denominations when we all meet. We're all probably out of fifteen of up probably twelve of us are from different denominations.

Jenkins: When you say fifteen what is that, how many people are in the group or--

Rich: Well there is more--

Jenkins: Who are you involved with? What organization are you involved with?

Rich: I'm involved in the Agape Prison Ministry.

Jenkins: Agape?

Rich: Uh huh, but now in the Agape Prison Ministry there's probably one hundred and fifty to two hundred people. But now we go every week into prison. But a different group goes every week, from this Agape Ministry. Like we have-- each person there's four people that's in charge of a group. Like I have a group that I'm in charge of to-- when they go the prison I tell them what they can take into an inmate. I can tell them what kind of ink pens they can carry in there. I tell them not to give the inmates gum or candy and stuff like that. Not to give the inmates money, because prison don't have money. And stuff like that. And anyone of these men that's in the group does something wrong then I'm the responsibility for it. So I take approximately eight to ten men in my group, called a unit. We have four different units. Then the Menonites have a unit and then another group will go in the next Saturday. And another group go in-- We go every Saturday into the state penitentiary. But we have four units like that goes. We have four peoples that in charge of that unit, while we're there.

Jenkins: Why are you in charge of the unit?

Rich: Because the Agape Prison Ministry, the head of it appointed me because I've been in the ministry the longest. And I know what to give them and I know how a convict can con you

quick.

Jenkins: How's that? How's he going to con you?

Rich: Well, it's easy to be conned and it's easy to be tricked from an inmate. Now, the inmate can have drugs being past in all at the same time you're in there. And the point of giving an inmate-- There's nothing wrong with giving gum or giving him a Certs or a piece of candy. But the point of it is, if an officer sees you give him something, and then the drugs comes up at the same time and he's busted. Then when you stand before a court and the officer is going to tell the truth. And he says, 'Well I did see the minister give him something, I don't know what it was.' But now that's going to sort of look like you guilty. Although, he is telling the truth. Although you're being truthful but you did give him something. Now it's the chance that they are not going to believe that it's bubble gum. [laughs]

Jenkins: Has that ever happened to you?

Rich: No, I don't give the inmates nothing. I don't give them nothing at all.

Jenkins: Is it--

Rich: The only thing I give an inmate, like tracts, bibles or stamps or envelopes and then I get that checked by an officer before I hand it to them. We try to obey the laws of the institution. If we want to give him something then we get an officer and show the officer what we want to give him. And then the officer goes back there while we give it to him. So we don't have no problems.

Jenkins: So tell me what's the process when you first get to the prison, who do you first come in contact with and how-- Where do you to to go through to--

Rich: Well you go, when you first get there you go into a tunnel. And then you go out of the cop car into a big room to where they un-handcuff you. Then they take you in and strip you. Then you have to take a bath and put stuff in your hair, and all the hair parts, your whole body, you have to take a bath. And anoint yourself in this stuff to make sure you don't catch lice or something, you know a disease or something like that. And then they put you on institution clothes. You're not allowed to wear your clothes at all when you first go in. Everything that you have on when you first go in, if you can't mail it home, they burn it. It's not been used again, you can take like a watch, your ring and your shoes. You can take them in with you and then they take a picture of you and they give you a picture ID that you wear at all times while you're in the institution. If you have a beard when you first go in, they trim your beard. You're allowed to keep your beard when you first go in. Mustache, you're allowed to keep that when you first go in. But now, if you cut it off while you're in there, it costs you six dollars. You have to have a new ID made and if you want to grow a beard or a mustache while you're in there it costs you six dollars, to continue to grow. They don't cut your hair and stuff no more, they used to shave everybody's heads. They don't do that no more. And once you

are there thirty days and transfer out on the yard you can have your own clothes sent to you and start wearing your own clothes. But that's the process, about all of it. Then they put you in a fish tank where everybody goes when they first come in. They run x-rays of you, your body, they check you for any kind of disease. They check you and see if you need glasses or any kind of dental work or any kind of surgeries. If you can go to a camp, if you're capable to work in a camp on the outside, hold a job, they'll try to send you to a camp somewhere to where you can work. They try to check you from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet to make sure nothing's wrong with you. Because of if there's anything wrong when you get there they take care of it. They have your glasses made, and give you teeth, make you some teeth. If you need surgery or and kind, they pay for it. Take you to Louisville General Hospital and have the work done. So, they check you pretty good.

Jenkins: That's not bad.

Rich: No, not when you first get there.

Jenkins: Well, another thing, too maybe this is, I didn't clarify it enough but, what process do you go as a prison minister? Like, who do you get to come in contact with?

Rich: I don't have to-- When I go to prison, only thing I have to do is verify who I am at the gate, show who I am. My name is already there to who I am and who I'm bringing in and all we do is just go up and lay our bibles down. They go through our bibles, search our bibles. Ah, look at our

tracts. Far as hand contact they don't touch us or search us or nothing.

Jenkins: They don't search you?

Rich: No, we go right straight on into prison. We don't have to have no contact with them except the front gate is the only person we have to talk to, to get in.

Jenkins: Is this prison ministry an income?

Rich: No, we don't get paid. It costs us. We have to pay our own food and our own way to go down there. So there's no income to it at all. It's all volunteer work. Nobody gets paid.

Jenkins: Even with the group--with the, what's the name of the group again?

Rich: The Agape Prison Ministry.

Jenkins: The Agape. How do you spell that?

Rich: Ah, I don't really know.

Jenkins: A-gape.

Rich: It's not a big word, it's about five or six letters.

Jenkins: I'm a pretty bad speller. [laughs]

Rich: Nobody in the whole ministry draws any salary off it. Now we have like, Mike Humble, who's churches supports, you know but the literature that we take in sometime and stuff like that. But far as anybody getting paid, no. Not that I know of and I been in it almost five years. I don't know nobody gets paid. [laughs]

Jenkins: This is-- How did God come into your life?

Rich: Well, just when I was in a cell there at La Grange and an inmate was telling me about God and he was telling me how

that I needed to pray and just ask God to come into my life and I just knelt down that night and started, just talking to Him. I didn't know how to pray. I was just talking and all of a sudden I felt good. Things inside started to feel like it was different. Next day or I see people that I didn't even like their looks. I see that I could like them. And I had an attitude of that going to prison. I been taught to go to prison, do your time, don't give nobody nothing, don't take nothing. But this time it was all

different. It seemed like I wanted to help people. I wanted to give people stuff without receiving anything back and that sort of how it was. I accepted God in prison myself.

Jenkins: How did you feel that first night?

Rich: I felt beautiful. [laughs] I mean, it was the best feeling I ever had in my life.

Jenkins: In what way?

Rich: Well, just knowing that I was free although I was in prison. The worries that I worried seemed like they just gone. I wasn't worried no more. I wasn't worried about when I was going to get out every day and stuff like that. It just felt like a burden was just taken off me right there in that cell, when I asked God to help me. Seemed like it was there. I had the help that day. Everything was different from that day on.

Jenkins: So did you, like feel better that night and that day and then when did you start preaching?

Rich: About two and half months after that. But I began to witness three or four days after I accept God and I couldn't read, didn't have no education at that time and I would hold bible study. All of the men would gather around their bed and even some of them couldn't read. And they would read to us and we all would try to help each other, each night. So it just went on from that day that I asked God to come into my life and to give me-- help me to where I could make it through this time and stuff like that. I felt different

from that day and I wanted to serve God ever since that night. It hasn't been nothing to look back to.

Jenkins: So, you wouldn't consider, you wouldn't say that you've had any formal training then. Have you?

Rich: No, I am a licensed and ordained minister.

Jenkins: Oh really?

Rich: I've pastored at a church, a Holy Place Church here in Bowling Green for about a year and five and one half months. I was ordained through that church.

Jenkins: What did you do there?

Rich: Pastored. I was the pastor of that church.

Jenkins: What was the name of it?

Rich: The Holy Place Church. And I was ordained through that and I'm bonded and licensed. [laughs]

Jenkins: Let's see. How do you feel this work has affected your family life? How has it changed?

Rich: Well, my family, like my kids, it's hard for them to understand what's really still going on. You know, daddy's been in prison. He spends his life in prison, now he goes back to prison all the time, so. It's-- Well, I have a daughter seventeen years old and she don't understand.

Jenkins: What do you tell her?

Rich: Well, she thinks-- There's times that my kids feel like that I care more about people who are in prison than I care about them. Because I'm always ready to go to prison and I'm always ready to go down on Main Street. So I-- It's hard to really explain to my kids what's really going on and what

I'm really trying to do. So, my kids, we really don't talk about it much, about me going into prison. They usually ask me about how a prison is and what goes on in prisons and stuff like that. So, that's about usually how many had accepted God today. And did they act like they'd changed or did they act like they got a feeling like you say you got, stuff like that. That's about all they ever ask.

Jenkins: Are they religious, sort of?

Rich: Well, my oldest daughter's not. My kids really don't understand religion right now. My wife does. She goes to church. We go to the same church.

Jenkins: Do you think you have to be pretty old to understand and accept it?

Rich: Well, I don't think there's an age limit, far as accepting it. But I think there's a age limit to understanding, you know. You can accept God, I feel like at any age. But before you can understand and stuff like that, I think there's a certain age a person has to get to realize that something you can't see is real. Like we don't see God and God is sort of like the wind, you know. We can't see the wind but we can look outside and see the trees blowing and know that something out there's moving that tree. Although we can't see it, we know it's something out there. So that's sort of the way God is. We know he's out there, we feel Him, but we can't see Him. It's kind of hard for a eight, nine, ten maybe a twelve year old, a thirteen year old to understand that things like that's real. But you

know, as they grow up into the world and begin to learn, that you know, although you don't see it, it's there. And then they begin to understand a lot better. And the bible is very hard to understand. Very hard to understand when you get into the Old Testament. It's real hard for a man that never knew God, never talked about God, don't know nothing about God and then read the bible. That's why I try to teach them they need to learn and study and go to ministers, go to church, so that they can understand what the Word is talking about. It's very confusing if you don't know what it means.

Jenkins: How do you study the bible?

Rich: I just read it and then I-- Mostly the New Testament is what I do a lot of reading, preaching out of. I sit down and I have a concord bible that I study with the bible. Then I have like--

Jenkins: What's that?

Rich: Well, it's a bible that tells the words plainer to a more of an education that we have now than it was back then. Instead of saying so many is and at's, you know, it leaves that part out and just explains what the scripture's talking about. So I use two different bibles, most of the time to study. Like American Standard you know, they bring it more down to my education. [laughs] So, there's a lot of words in the bible that can't mention, whole bunch of them.

Jenkins: Can't mention?

Rich: Yeah, that I don't know about-- They're just hard, I can't--

I don't know the names of them. So there's a lot of big words in the bible. But they have like, the American Standard Bible that reads the same way except leaves out a lot of words, but explains the same thing only simpler, to where that you can understand. So that's what I try to read.

Jenkins: This is a little bit of a follow up but, what do your kids think you do? I mean, obviously you're not a-- What do these people think you do? You're never at home, don't they wonder?

Rich: No, because they can usually get hold of me any time. Usually when I'm not at home I'm-- If I leave to go and like out of town or something, my family always knows. I always let them know that I'm leaving town. But now here in town there's a lot of times that I go to the hospital and I don't get home until twelve, one o'clock in the morning.

Jenkins: You minister at the hospital?

Rich: Yeah, I go through room to room and talk to people that's in the hospital. You know, that might want prayer or something like that and we pray for them. Yeah, I do that.

Jenkins: Do you do that a lot? Do you consider yourself a prison minister or just a minister?

Rich: Yeah, I consider myself as a prison minister. But also a minister is pray with the broken hearts, mend the broken hearts and to help all type people. I feel like that that's where my calling is, in prison ministry. But when you say ministry and a calling, you know, you're called to minister wherever God wants you. So, I do minister to a lot

of different type people. I have a lot of people that call me, you know, when they get drunk and talk to me. Some talk to commit suicide and a lot of divorces, separations. I talk to a lot of people.

Jenkins: Can you tell me any stories about somebody calling you up late at night and--

Rich: Well, just drunks, you know, they, ah, call you and want you to come and talk to them and--